

Hart apparently man of influence

One of the Washougal area's first farmers was George W. Hart, who distinguished himself more as a perennial politician and donor of land for an early school than for his success in tilling the soil.

His name first appears in a permanent historical record in the 1850 census. This was the first U.S. census of Oregon Territory of which Clark County was then a part. His name and that of two other Harts, probably brothers, were listed by the enumerator among six adult males who lived in House Number 28. No other address is specified, but it may be assumed that the census taker used a crude map to locate the buildings. Hart was listed as a native of New York and 28 years of age.

The bachelor quarters were probably located in the Vancouver area, as there were only 95 houses listed in the first census, and the higher numbered dwellings were occupied by known residents of the future Camas-Washougal area.

By the time of the 1860 census Hart was married and had a family and was living on the Benjamin Potter farm north of the present Orchard Hills Golf Course. One of his brothers was also listed as a resident.

Hart's first venture in to politics was in 1853, shortly after Washington was separated from Oregon as a territory of its own. Hart ran for and was elected county sheriff. It is not known whether he had any opposition, as the political records used for this story were printed in an old book called "History of Clark County," by Alley and Munro-Fraser. These writers listed only the officers elected, through 1886. All official records were destroyed in the 1890 courthouse fire.

In 1856 Hart was replaced as sheriff, but was elected justice of the peace of Washougal precinct, which included everything east of the Fisher area. A year later he was elected county commissioner, a position he held until 1862. He was out of office for a year, and was back in the commissioner's office in 1863. He served in this role until 1867.

He was a "bear for punishment." In 1864, while he was county commissioner, he was either elected or appointed justice of the peace for Washougal precinct again, and held this job until 1872. Then he was

elected probate judge.

Two years later, in 1874, Hart was back on the job as county commissioner. This same year he was appointed by President U.S. Grant as postmaster of the re-activated Washougal post office, a job he held until 1867. The post office was probably in his farm home.

It is not known whether the voters liked the idea of Hart holding both a county and a federal job at the same time. However, both were part time jobs; the duties of the county

commissioner in Clark County were not considered full time until about 85 years later, in the 1950's.

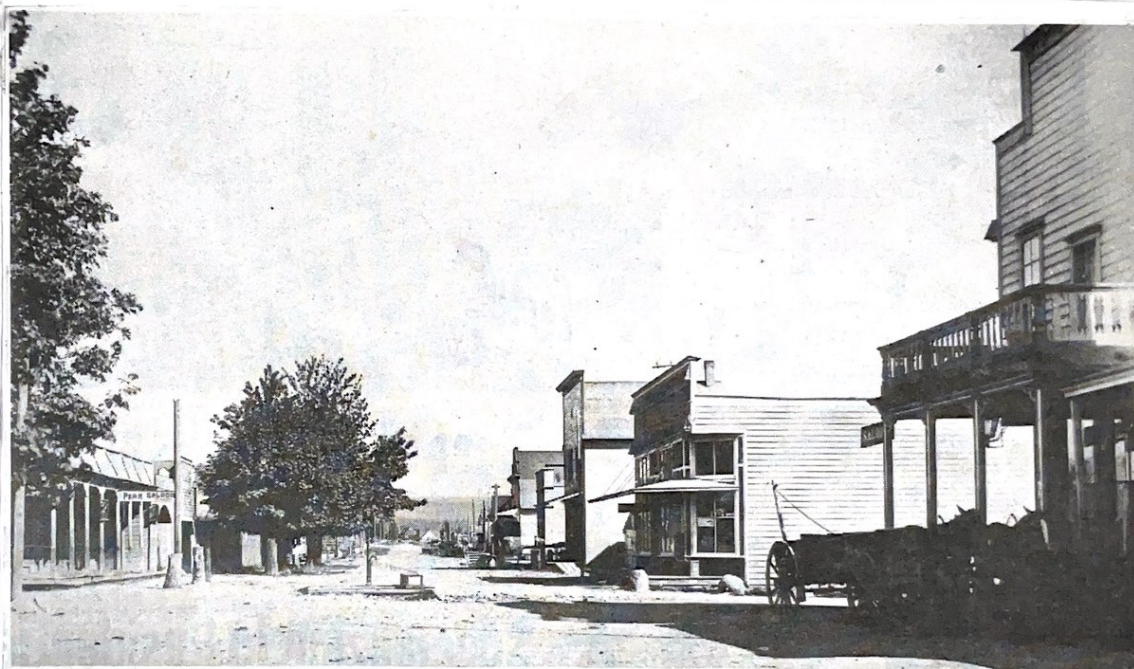
In 1876, Hart either did not run or was defeated for re-election as county commissioner, but two years later he was again on the public payroll as justice of the peace of Washougal precinct. He served six more years, until 1884. This was the last office he held so far as we know. He was now 62 years old and had served 30 years in public office in one capacity or another.

Sometime after 1880, when the present townsite of Washougal was platted, Hart is supposed to have given a piece of land north of the present golf course for the first school in the "new" area. Probably a grateful citizenry elected him to the school board, although there is no known record of it.

Obviously, he enjoyed public life. It certainly provided variety in the life of a man who otherwise would have toiled from sunup until dark on his

farm. With a husky family and a brother living with him, there must have been enough "free" labor to operate the farm with a minimum of effort on Hart's part.

Thus "Judge" Hart may have been one of the first "gentlemen farmers" in this area. Certainly, he was a knowledgeable man, who knew all the "news" and probably spent uncounted hours discussing the affairs of the times behind potbellied stoves in country stores. —M.B.



DOWNTOWN WASHOUGAL looked like this in the late 1880s, although the streets weren't always this deserted. At right is the town's first store (with balcony). Built by Al Kersey for Joe Durgan, it was located across Main Street from Braun's Hotel. The town pump, at center, was a favorite stopping-off spot for weary travelers and their horses.



THIS MID 1880s shot shows downtown Washougal, as seen from near the docks at the Columbia River front. Note the sturdy plank walk, to insure steady footing when the ground transformed itself to mud.